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THE NEW CULT OF MECHANISED FAITH

THIS title applies to a very aggressive and plausible movement, which professes to have found the power of Christian Faith in a new and deeper and more scriptural way than Christians and the Christian Church have hitherto discovered it. It therefore wears an evangelical garb, so that if it is, as my examination will show, gravely unscriptural both in doctrine and action, it becomes a duty for evangelical Christians to be prayerfully on their guard against it. The most dangerous of all enemies is the one that comes, whether sincerely or insincerely, in the garb of a friend. For, although much crudity and meaningless clamour and pretence can be found in its rank and file, it is also strongly aided by the capture of a certain number of cultured adherents and leaders, whose sincerity we do not for a moment call into doubt. On the other hand, the basis of all the teaching is so mechanical that even presuming ignorance easily and audaciously usurps the role of leadership. This is a religious danger not to be under-estimated. This new mechanical conception of the life of Faith has sought acceptance, and extensively obtained it, by tracing its ultimate discovery and authority to the great spiritual visionary, George Müller, of Bristol. But the whole of this claim is based upon a superficial resemblance, and not upon the spiritual foundations of Christian faith and life, upon which George Müller founded his whole being. They have stolen from his treasures a simple label or two, and have entirely missed their deeper spiritual meanings. They have mechanised Faith and Life; he profoundly spiritualised them. Those who know the far-flung religious influence of George Müller, before, and apart from, this mechanising cult, know how deeply spiritual and loyally scriptural it was. He did his great work before the eyes of the world, and, as a sincere Christian always does, trusted in his God to bless and prosper it, not only with the necessary sustenance, but also with all other blessings. All men and causes and Churches that passed under his influence linked their trust in God with non-mechanical spiritual effort and power. They were spiritually devoted to

the age-long evangelical interpretation of the word of God, and thus lived by the spiritual development of the life of faith, and not by exploiting Faith as a well-balanced mechanical arrangement. We shall see that in the New Cult all this is altered, for the travailing spirit of faith is banished, and only a new mechanism, still bearing the label of Faith, remains to tick out its mechanistic process.

I

It has not been easy to see whither all this is bound, but now a clear light has been shed upon it by the issue of an authoritative book by one of the most cultured leaders of the new cult. From this book I shall quote a number of significant paragraphs. The book is given full publicity by its author, so that my quotations can be easily verified by my readers. Besides, I happen to have had a close view of the movement also on its cruder and more untutored side, where the very crudeness emphasises the falsities of its basic pronouncements. Strange as it may seem, the fantastic sayings and doings of a most crude and illiterate self-appointed "leader" of the cult furnish a ready illustration of the barren falsity of the whole position set out by the cultured author I have mentioned. But the latter supplies another very sinister and ominous element. Starting with the mechanisation of Faith, he finds it necessary to bring his theology into line with this basic mechanism by mechanising other cardinal spiritual facts and forces, not excluding the infinite glories of the Deity. It is scarcely necessary to point out that this marks a short and swift path to the gravest anti-scriptural errors. We will give the Faith Mechanism rest for a moment, and show how it has led directly to the mechanisation of the Deity. The infinite freedom of the Godhead is mechanised in the following way.

"The Father *thinks* His thoughts in man. The Son *speaks* His creative word of Faith by man. The Spirit *manifests* the *substance* through man."

This facile reduction of the processes of the infinite God to mechanical routine would, if it stood alone, probably merely provoke a smile. But the author makes it clear that he regards it as a profound metaphysical discovery, to which all his other theological beliefs must conform, and which is intended to bear the weight of much mechanical theology. His idea is that the

term LOGOS, which John applies to Christ, is the all-sufficient ground for this peculiar conception, and the sure ground for all his advanced theories of the operations of Faith. It will be self-evident to most Christians that such an analysis of the boundless Deity has no foundation, least of all in the glory-depths of the LOGOS designation; which, by the way, means far more than the bare "WORD" of the English translation. I have underlined the word "Substance" in the author's classification of the Holy Spirit, because, as we shall see, it points to a curious, but mischievous, error in the Cult of mechanised Faith.

After such a foundation it is no surprise that the prayer of Faith is mechanised into something which is not Prayer at all. The Faith cult has to meet and sit in council until it receives, "in an inward certainty, clear, peaceful, indescribable, that 'so and so is God's will in this thing'". Before this comes, we never move, unless it be merely for light, but we can now rise and advance. God has made known His mind. In Jesus' name we break through. We declare the word of Faith. 'That government will give way.' 'That area will be opened.' 'That money will come.' 'Those souls will be saved.' The *word*, if we are rightly abiding, is spoken in the same power and through the same Person who made the declaration at the earliest dawn of history, 'Let there be light'. It is repeated again as occasion arises; not prayer, not aspiration, nor hope; but praise, declaration, quiet reception of a supply already given, a calling of those things that be not as though they were. As we do that, the manifestation of the thing believed comes to pass as surely as the harvest follows the sowing."

One need not hesitate to say that this description no more resembles the prayer of faith described and enjoined in the word of God than a controlled machine resembles a living being. In fact, as the author naively admits, it is not prayer at all, and may become exceedingly dangerous to the praying spirit of man; for there is not the slightest Biblical ground for such a supernatural mechanism as is here described, or for such supernatural foreknowledge, whether in prayer or out of it. The danger of self-deception is unbounded, and I have seen lamentable instances of it. Let me cite one notorious example as an illustration.

A "leader" of the illiterate type in this mechanised Faith cult claimed, by this quasi-divine assurance of Faith, in the

year 1939, the foreknowledge that the threatened great War would certainly not happen. He followed our Author's ideal course,—“not prayer, but praise”. He made a great stir, for he too had his “Faith” students. He held a great thanksgiving Meeting, to praise the Lord for revealing to His “servant” that the general anticipation of war was altogether wrong. This was what our Author calls the “sowing”. But the harvest proved to be the greatest world war ever known upon the earth. I will not detail the devices of the “Faith” prophet to cover this colossal falsehood. He is not unknown to our Author. At least, the latter will do well to give careful and prayerful consideration to the circumstances. A truly spiritual Faith belongs to a higher realm of truth. Our Author's debating conferences may certainly have an organising power to preserve mechanical unity, and probably have done so. But that is not the unity of the Spirit. The latter comes from the high and holy unity of consecrated spiritual freedom.

II

Illiteracy and ignorance often give vivid emphasis to a fallacy or falsehood, when culture forms with it an unequal alliance. Even our Author gives a prior place to the interests of finance—“that money will come”. The illiterate “Faith” prophet has shown me this money craze in wild and unrestrained action. In his “Faith” institution the air was rent day after day with loud cries for “that money”, to be supernaturally bestowed. The Lord of spiritual glory was reduced to a banking-house from which “that money” must come. Poor little ignorant and ill-informed “students” debited the Almighty with certain definite amounts, which were due to their wonderful faith. It is true that even the casual onlooker detected the prophet's habit of using many subtle devices for getting the money outside the supernatural, and there was little account given of the way in which the money “of the Lord” would be spent. I was informed of some cases when some compassionate soul, hearing the very audible cries for “cash” from heaven, gave some little wretch the money he demanded from God, and straightway it was announced that the prayer of Faith was answered, and that the money had come “from the Lord”. Could anyone, in this bog of money-mania, sanely realise that God has natural laws, as well as spiritual, to be honoured and

obeyed, or that the essential prayer of the spiritual life is to receive the fullness of the Spirit of God? Here again illiteracy and ignorance strongly emphasise the folly which culture may partly hide.

God's gifts of grace are wholly supernatural, but heaven necessarily uses an economy of the supernatural in the natural realm, in order that God's "Laws of Nature" may be duly honoured. "If a man will not work, neither shall he eat." The Israelites received water from the rock in the wilderness, but had to dig wells in the border of the promised land. Peter said, "Silver and gold have I none", but did not call a council of prayer—or praise—to supply the deficit. His faith had deeper interests, to which the material means were simply an added and unailing appendage.

I now give another instance of the way in which crude illiteracy may fling into strong light the more subtle fallacies of culture. The Author we are examining makes the rather cryptic statement, "Christ saw His Father's invisible and unlimited supply, gave thanks for it, seized on the full assurance of it, and Faith was seen to be 'the giving of *substance* to things hoped for'". The "Faith prophet" I have already mentioned has shed a blazing light on this dark sentence, making its amazing meaning clear. For years he gave no audited public account of his receipts and expenditure to the contributing public. Why should he? The money had come straight from God, as the reward of his Abrahamic faith. At length, however, after the lapse of years, he considered it discreet to issue a belated balance sheet for a later year, and the balance sheet was duly audited by a member of his own staff. I learned, from trustworthy authority, that this balance sheet contained a statement of considerable receipts of money, which had never actually been received. My informant, a lady evangelist, challenged the honesty of such a procedure, and was told by the satellites of the "Faith prophet" that, although the money had not been received, this misleading account was quite correct, because "Faith was *substance*". By careful comparison, it is easy to see that this man and our Author got this idea by the crude distortion of the classic definition of Faith in the epistle to the Hebrews, a stupid distortion which one would have deemed impossible for any scholar. The English word "substance" has radically changed its meaning since the English Authorised

translation was made, for the Greek original does not mean the solid actuality of anything, but its "potentiality" in relation to the future. This fact makes the treatment of Faith as "solid substance" grotesque. It is almost incredible that any reasoning mind should imagine that it justifies affirming the receipt of a thousand pounds when not a penny of it has been received.

The errors of our "Faith Author" are too numerous to deal with in this article, but the deplorable effect of this mechanisation upon the foundations of evangelical truth cannot be passed over. This false mechanisation not only, as we have seen, compels the mechanisation of the Deity, but also that of the great cardinal truths of the Christian faith, which are thus distorted and rejected. We note for examination the three cardinal truths,—the new birth of the sinner into spiritual life, the radical alienation of the unregenerate sinner from God, and the atonement made for fallen humanity by the death of our Lord. Our Author, whether he is aware of it or not, denies the Biblical revelation of man's radically fallen and sinful Nature. Here is his version of the moral and spiritual status of unregenerate Man.

"Fallen man has to arise and grasp the heights and depths of the fact that *he is a son* in Christ, together with the Son. At regeneration, by the mercy of God, he believes *almost mechanically*." It is rather humorously curious that, in the last clause, he has a fleeting glimpse of the fact that he is crudely mechanising the profound and vital action of living Faith. But the flash passes unheeded. After mechanising the Deity, it was not possible to avoid mechanising the vital energies of Faith. Elsewhere we find that he bases his whole conception of the Fall of man upon the parable of the Prodigal Son. The unregenerate sinner is *already a Son*, and has only to "come to himself", that is, to realise his sonship. This unchanged and unregenerate Self, when it is self-realised as equivalent to Sonship, is acceptable to the holy God. This clearly means that Adam's sin did not introduce into humanity a radically evil nature. This is a deplorable error which is contradicted by the whole of the New Testament revelation. It makes the New Testament emphasis on the need of regeneration futile and foolish; for the unregenerate sinner is essentially a Son, and needs no change of nature to realise, that he is, without knowing it, a genuine son from the beginning. Such an exposition makes

the limited outlook of a single parable exclude all the rest of the Divine revelation. It contradicts our Saviour when He affirmed that certain evil men were not His "sheep" at all, and that they were not "sons of God", but children of the devil. It contradicts our Saviour's emphasis on the new birth: for one who is already a son, not dominated by an indwelling evil nature, cannot possibly need to be born again. Without the intrusion of an evil nature, there is no conceivable reason why the sin of Adam should be followed by the sin of any other member of the race. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, thus interpreted, there is no need or room for the atonement of Calvary. The unregenerate sinner has only to "*come to himself, kiss, and make friends*".

Our Author consistently, and necessarily, follows this up by similarly mechanising the New Birth of the believer. Here is his amazing declaration:

"Does the Scripture teach that a new Divine nature *from without* is implanted in the redeemed child of God, as some separate endowment engrafted by some means in the believer? We think not." The words, "from without", are very strange as applied to the eternal and all-immanent God, but it is not alien from our Author's mechanical way of thinking. It is more important to note the downright contradiction of the fundamental principle of Regeneration. It is all but madness to make a New Birth mean a Birth of Nothing. "That which is Born of the Spirit is spirit." The Holy Spirit can only dwell in a *new* spiritual Nature, not in the unchanged *evil Nature* of the Fall.

This is the Evangel of the Cross. Our Author pays verbal homage to the Cross, but his erroneous conceptions of the soul of the Evangel deprive it of its infinite and enthralling and redemptive meaning. The evangel of Jesus cannot be mechanised. It is measureless Spirit and Life.

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